

## FOOTBALL SAFETY/RISK WARNING

The Seattle Wash. School Dist. and coach were sued (and lost) for 6.3 million dollars by the parent whose son became a quadriplegic as a result of a football injury. Following are the allegations against them:

The athlete was not adequately warned about the dangers of lowering the head, or of making primary contact with the top of the helmet.

The athlete was never specifically warned that if he struck another player with the top of his helmet, he could sustain a neck injury that could result in his becoming a quadriplegic.

The athlete's parents were never warned of the specific injuries that their son could sustain in football, SPECIFICALLY, THEY WERE NEVER TOLD HE COULD BECOME A QUADRIPLEGIC.

Coaches did not provide written or illustrative material on:

1. The proper way of running with the ball
2. The dangers of lowering the head while running with the ball or of using the head as a primary point of contact.

Coaches did not use effective drills or variety of methods to teach players how to run with the ball safely and to insure they don't lower their heads.

Players were not adequately informed regarding the reason for "spearing" rule.

Players were not sufficiently warned or admonished if they lowered their heads while making contact with other players.

Football is a contact sport and injuries will occur. The coaches and staff working in our program are well qualified, professional people. Fundamentals related to playing football will continually and repeatedly be emphasized on and off the field. The information contained within this list of Rules and Procedures is to inform the young men in our program and their parents of proper techniques to practice for maximum safety. Some professions tend to be very safety-conscious, and coaching is one of them.

By rule, the helmet is not to be used as a "ram". Initial contact is not to be made with the helmet. It is not possible to play the game safely or correctly without making some contact with the helmet when properly blocking and tackling an opponent. Therefore, technique is most important in preventing injuries.

Tackling and blocking techniques are basically the same. Contact is to be made above the waist but not initially with the helmet. The player should always be in a position of balance, knees bent, back straight, body slightly bent forward, head-up, target area as near to the body as possible with the main contact being made with the shoulder.

Blocking and tackling by not putting the helmet as close to the body as possible could result in shoulder injury such as separation or a pinched nerve in the neck area. The reason for following the safety rules in making contact with the upper body and helmet is that improper body alignment can put the spinal column in a vulnerable position for injury.

**REMEMBER:: NEVER LOWER YOUR HEAD!!!**

If the head is bent downward, the cervical (neck) vertebrae are in a bind and contact on top of the helmet could result in dislocation, nerve damage, paralysis or even death. If the back is not straight, the thorax (mid-back) and lumbar vertebrae are also vulnerable to injury with similar results if contact again is made with the top of the helmet. A high school workout should include isotonic type exercises. Football players must have strong, well developed neck muscles to help prevent injury. We have machines in our weight room especially for that purpose.

If the knees are not bent, the chance of knee injury is greatly increased. Fundamentally, a player should be in the proper hitting position at all times during live ball play and this point will be repeated continually during practice.

The dangers are anything from strained muscles to ankle injuries or serious knee injuries requiring surgery. The rules have made blocking below the waist (outside a two-yard by four-yard area next to the football) illegal. Cleats have been restricted to no more than  $\frac{1}{2}$ " to further help in preventing knee injuries.

In tackling, the rules prohibit initial contact with the helmet or grabbing the face mask or edge of the helmet. These restrictions were placed in the rules because of serious injuries resulting from non-compliance to these safety precautions. Initial helmet contact could result in a bruise, dislocation, broken bones, head injury, internal injury such as kidneys, spleen, bladder, etc. Grabbing the face mask or helmet edge could result in a neck injury, which could be anything from a muscle strain to a dislocation, nerve injury or spinal column DAMAGE causing PARALYSIS or DEATH. The illegal play by participating athletes will not be tolerated and all players are repeatedly reminded of the dangers of unsportsmanlike acts.

Shoulder pads, helmets, hip pads, pants (including thigh pads and knee pads) must have proper fitting and use. All players are fitted for equipment, but they should have at least a basic knowledge of their correct fit. Of course, injury could occur even with properly fitted equipment due to using improper techniques (i.e., blocking and tackling), or from a freak accident.

Shoulder pads that are too small will leave the shoulder point vulnerable to bruises or separation. They could also be too tight in the neck area, resulting in a possible pinched nerve. Shoulder pads that are too large will leave the neck area poorly protected and will slide on the shoulders, making them vulnerable to bruises or separations.

Helmets must fit snugly at the contact points: front, back, and top of the head. The helmet must be safety "NOCSAE" branded; the chin strap must be of the proper thickness; the player must have a mouthpiece. On contact, too tight a helmet could result in a headache. Too loose a fit could result in headaches, a concussion, a face injury such as a broken nose or cheekbone, or a blow to the back of the neck causing a neck injury, possibly quite serious such as PARALYSIS or even DEATH. REMEMBER: Don't leave the equipment room until you and the trainer are both satisfied.

This report does not cover all potential injury possibilities in playing football, but it is an attempt to make the players and their parents aware that fundamentals, coaching and proper fitting equipment are important to their safety and enjoyment in playing football.

We understand the Rules and Procedures as explained above, and are aware of the risks involved in playing football. We also understand the necessity of using the proper techniques while participating in the football program. I have read the preceding and certify that I know, understand, and appreciate the risks inherent in football. I am voluntarily participating in this activity.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student (Print Name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Signature

Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Signature

Date \_\_\_\_\_